

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PHNOM 04679 311515Z

43

ACTION EA-14

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DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 AID-20 IO-14 DRC-01 /109 W

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O R 311425ZM MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE5594

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

CINCPAC

COMUSSAG

AMEMBASSY SAIGON

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE PHNOM PENH 4679

E.O.11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT CB

SUBJECT: CHENG HENG PRESS CONFERENCE ON DISSOLUTION OF
HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL

1. SUMMARY. BEATING LON NOL TO THE DRAW, HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL VICE PRESIDENT CHENG HENG CALLED PRESS CONFERENCE THIS EVENING (MARCH 31) TO ANNOUNCE DISSOLUTION OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL AND THE RESIGNATION OF THREE CABINET MINISTERS LOYAL TO HIM. HE INDICATED THAT U.S. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR HIS OUSTER FROM POWER. END SUMMARY.

2. INFORMED THAT PRESIDENT LON NOL WOULD ANNOUNCE DISSOLUTION OF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL AT 2100 THIS EVENING, CHENG HENG HASTILY CALLED A PRESS CONFERENCE FOR 1800 (HE INFORMED US AT MOMENT PRESS CONFERENCE BEGAN) TO GIVE HIS SIDE OF THE STORY. ASIDE FROM AFP CORRESPONDENT, WHO LEFT DURING FIRST FEW MINUTES, NO WESTERN JOURNALISTS ATTENDED THE CONFERENCE. FOLLOWING ARE HIGHLIGHTS AS PROVIDED US BY UPI KHMER EMPLOYEE.

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PAGE 02 PHNOM 04679 311515Z

3. CHENG HENG STATED THAT, ALTHOUGH HE HAD TODAY AGREED TO THE DISSOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL, THE TIMING FOR THIS STEP WAS ILL-CHOSEN AS UNGA WILL SOON BE MEETING IN SPECIAL SESSION. CHENG HENG SAID HE WISHED TO ASSURE THE PUBLIC THAT DISSOLUTION WAS NOT HIS DOING.

4. CHENG HENG ADDED THAT THE COUNCIL'S DISSOLUTION WILL ALSO CAUSE THE GOVERNMENT DIFFICULTIES AND ANNOUNCED THAT THE MINISTERS OF JUSTICE, HEALTH AND INDUSTRY, WHO ATTENDED THE PRESS CONFERENCE, HAVE SUBMITTED THEIR RESIGNATION. CHENG HENG ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THESE RESIGNATIONS WILL NOT BRING ABOUT THE FALL OF THE GOVERNMENT, WHICH CAN REPLACE THEM OR ASK THEM TO REMAIN. IF THE LATTER COURSE IS TAKEN, CHENG HENG IMPLIED HE WOULD BE WILLING TO DISCUSS CONTINUED COOPERATION.

5. CLAIMING THAT HE HAD AGREED TO SERVE ON THE COUNCIL ONLY ON THE INSISTANCE OF THE U.S. (HE MENTIONED FSO HARBIN'S NAME), AND TO HELP HIS COUNTRY, CHENG HENG SAID THE AMERICANS HAVE NOW GIVEN HIM A STAB IN THE BACK. HE MENTIONED AT ONE POINT THAT THE U.S. EMBASSY WAS "IMPLICATED" IN THE COUNCIL'S DISSOLUTION AND AT ANOTHER THAT THE EMBASSY WAS "ADVISED" OF THE ACTION. HE ADDED THAT AMBASSADOR DEAN WAS INFORMED OF THE MOVE AFTER HIS ARRIVAL HERE.

6. ASKED IF A VICE PRESIDENT WILL BE APPOINTED, CHENG HENG SAID HE DID NOT KNOW AND ADDED THAT THE MATTER IS VERY COMPLICATED. IF THE HIGH POLITICAL COUNCIL IS NOT NECESSARY, CHENG HENG CONTINUED, AN ORGANIZATION TO REPLACE THE COUNCIL IS NOT NECESSARY. AS FAR AS WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO DETERMINE, CHENG HENG DID NOT OTHERWISE INDICATE THAT A REPLACEMENT FOR THE COUNCIL IS BEING CONTEMPLATED.

7. CHENG HENG REVEALED THAT HE WILL BE LEAVING SOON FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT IN FRANCE. QUERIED WHETHER HE WOULD BE WILLING TO SERVE IN A FUTURE GOVERNMENT, HE SAID HE WOULD CONSIDER THAT PROSPECT WHEN IT ARISES.
DEAN

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